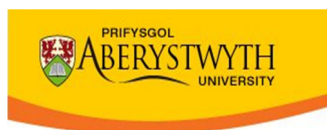


Mindfulness Behaviour Change and Engagement in Public Policy

An Evaluation

October 2014

Rachel Lilley, Mark Whitehead, Rachel Howell, Rhys Jones, and Jessica Pykett



Contents

Acknowledgements.....	1
Executive Summary	3
1 Introduction	5
2 Mindfulness and Behaviour Change: Exploring the Connections	7
3 The Mindfulness, Behaviour Change and Engagement in Public Policy 8-Week Programme.....	14
4 Evaluation Results.....	17
5 Future Directions.....	27
References	28

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The deeper levels of personal awareness of self and others developed within the course appeared to lead participants to support behaviour change policies that were empowering and non-manipulative. Related to this, participants stated that the course had confirmed the importance they attached to being more open about the policy-making process.

Mindfulness, Behaviour Change and Engagement in Public Policy: An Evaluation

Executive Summary

This report has been written in order to provide an account of the delivery and impact of the *Mindfulness, Behaviour Change and Engagement in Public Policy* programme. The *Mindfulness, Behaviour Change and Engagement in Public Policy* programme (hereafter MBCEPP) was developed as part of an Economic and Social Research Council funded project entitled **Negotiating Neuroliberalism: Changing Behaviours, Values, and Beliefs** and delivered in partnership with the Welsh Government. The programme was developed in order to explore whether the experience of practicing mindfulness would enable participants to enhance their understanding of the principles that inform contemporary behaviour change policies.

The MBCEPP programme was delivered to 15 members of the Welsh Government's civil service. The primary aim of the MBCEPP programme was to test the extent to which mindfulness training could provide a practice-based context within which those who make and deliver public policy could learn about the nature of human behaviour and how it can be transformed. A brief summary of the results of this programme is outlined below.

Behaviour Change and Policy

- Evaluation of the MBCEPP programme revealed that participants experienced a significant increase in their understandings of the principles of behaviour change following the course.
- Following the course participants were able to more effectively recognise the limitations of conventional, regulatory policy tools (such as laws, subsidies, and penalties), which tend to assume that humans respond in rational ways to policy prompts.

Impacts of Mindfulness Training

- When we asked participants to assess the extent to which they felt they had seen an increase in their mindfulness traits (observing, describing, non-reacting, awareness, non-judging) following the course, they reported a measurable increase in mindfulness for each trait assessed.
- Participants suggested that the mindfulness training they had received as part of this course had contributed to their overall enjoyment of life and wellbeing.
- Although the MBCEPP programme was developed as a non-therapeutic form of intervention, it was still able to deliver forms of therapeutic benefits (particularly in relation to stress relief).
- It appears that by facilitating more focused attention on the present moment, and providing the opportunity for reflection, that the MBCEPP enabled participants to work more effectively and creatively.
- Participants reflected that in enabling them to understand the complexities of their own experience that the mindfulness practice had made them much more sensitive towards the views, feelings and perspectives of others.

Mindfulness and Behaviour Change

- Participants claimed that mindfulness practice had enhanced the ways in which they understood human behaviour and the related principles of behaviour change.
- The deeper levels of personal awareness of self and others developed within the course appeared to lead participants to support behaviour change policies that were empowering and non-manipulative.
- The course was able to move learning about behaviour change from the abstract and impersonal, to the practical and personal.

The MBCEPP and the Civil Service

- It appears that the practices of mindfulness encouraged participants to want to build a civil service that was geared towards deep public service.
- The MBCEPP programme enabled participants to more openly recognize, discuss and respond to the subjective influences that routinely inform their work and achieve much more meaningful forms of objectivity than they had previously been able to maintain.

1 Introduction

1.1 Some Background

This report has been written in order to provide an account of the delivery and impact of the *Mindfulness, Behaviour Change and Engagement in Public Policy* programme. The *Mindfulness, Behaviour Change and Engagement in Public Policy* programme (hereafter MBCEPP) was developed as part of an Economic and Social Research Council funded project entitled *Negotiating Neuroliberalism: Changing Behaviours, Values, and Beliefs* and delivered in partnership with the Welsh Government.

The MBCEPP programme was delivered to 15 members of the Welsh Government's civil service. The primary aim of the MBCEPP programme was to test the extent to which mindfulness training could provide a practice-based context within which those who make and deliver public policy could learn about the nature of human behaviour and how it can be transformed. The premise of the programme was to build participants' skills in paying attention to thoughts and experiences (the practice of mindfulness), whilst introducing relevant information from the psychological and social sciences on behaviour change (particularly relating to behavioural biases, the nature of rationality, habit formation, and heuristics).

I work with people and policy all day, often trying to shift behaviours and ways of doing things. If I don't understand myself and why I do what I do, how on earth can I understand people outside and expect to make change?

— MBCEPP Participant

Following an initial “taster session” (delivered to approximately 35 civil servants), the inaugural MBCEPP programme ran from April to June 2014 and was led by Rachel Lilley (who is a mindfulness teacher and researcher at Aberystwyth University) with some input from Professor Mark Whitehead (who is also based at Aberystwyth University). The programme was evaluated through three methods: 1. a before and after quantitative survey; 2. in-depth qualitative interviews with participants; 3. a post-programme feedback/feed-forward workshop facilitated by Diana Reynolds of the Welsh Government.

1.2 Goals

This report has four primary goals:

- 1 To provide an account of the ways in which it is possible to think about the relationship between mindfulness training, behaviour change, and public policy-delivery.
- 2 To offer a synopsis of the design and delivery of the MBCEPP programme and the thinking that informed its development.
- 3 To offer a summary of the evaluations carried out as part of the programme.
- 4 To consider the implications of MBCEPP for how we think about the role of mindfulness in society and how policy-makers approach questions of behaviour change.

I am able to focus on things much better and it helps you feel much calmer about the things that you have to do. I think you get much more enjoyment as well when you apply that to anything. You get much more enjoyment from even carrying out quite simple tasks.

— MBCEPP Participant



Rachel Lilley outside the Welsh Government Offices, Cardiff

2 Mindfulness and Behaviour Change: Exploring the Connections

2.1 Introducing Mindfulness

The practice of mindfulness has a history that stretches back over two and a half thousand years. Mindfulness was originally a Buddhist practice that was recorded in the *Satipatthāna Sutta* (the Discourse of Establishing Mindfulness, found in the Pali Canon). Mindfulness is often defined as *present-centred non-judgmental awareness*. While it originates in Buddhist traditions, the last forty years have witnessed the application of mindfulness in a wide range of secular therapeutic and professional contexts. The development of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) (which was introduced by Jon Kabat-Zinn as a practice for pain management), and Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) (which has been used to alleviate certain mental illnesses) are perhaps the most well known secular applications of mindfulness (Bodhi, 2013: 19-120; Williams, 2011). In the context of these prominent initiatives, it now appears that mindfulness is entering the social and political mainstream (see Bunting, 2014). The National Institute of Clinical Excellence (UK) recently endorsed mindfulness as a treatment for repeat episode depression, and it is now being used within the NHS as a recommended treatment. The *.b Mindfulness in Schools Project* (pronounced *dot be*) is promoting the use of mindfulness practices in education and exploring the ways in which it can be incorporated into curricula. Mindfulness is also being adopted in the corporate sector, with Google, EBay, Twitter and Facebook among a series of companies who promote the practice among their employees.

More recently, in the UK there has been a growing interest in the potential application of mindfulness within government. Governmental interest in mindfulness in the UK can be characterized in two main ways. First, mindfulness training is being offered to MPs and Lords in Westminster, and Assembly Members in the National Assembly for Wales. In this context, mindfulness is being deployed as a form of work-based practice designed to support political representatives in their day-to-day lives. Second, the UK government has recently established an All Party Parliamentary Group (hereafter APPG) to study the benefits of bringing mindfulness into public policy. The Mindfulness APPG is supported by the Mindfulness Initiative, a coalition of Oxford, Exeter and Bangor Universities working 'to promote a better understanding of mindfulness and its potential in a range of public services'. Focusing initially on health, education, and criminal justice, the APPG is exploring the evidence base that could support the wider application of mindfulness techniques. As we discuss in greater detail below, the provision of mindfulness training to MPs, Lords and

Assembly Members, and the establishment of the mindfulness APPG resonates strongly with our own attempts to deliver mindfulness training within the Welsh Civil Service.

As a practice of *present-centred awareness*, mindfulness involves the training of attention so that the world can be experienced more fully moment-by-moment. Mindfulness practices (including body scans, breathing exercises, and mindful movements, among other things) focus on guiding a dispersed consciousness back to the present, by developing an awareness of the thoughts and feelings that prevent us from focusing on the here and now. Dispersed consciousness can be the product of ruminating on past events, planning for the short and long-term, multiple task processing, or dealing with emotions.

The *non-judgmental* dimension of mindfulness supports people in becoming more aware and accepting of the mental, embodied and environmental forces that shape their experiences, without being reactive to or overwhelmed by them. In this way, mindfulness supports the development of attentiveness to the role of feelings as prompts for thoughts, and the ways that thoughts generate certain forms of emotional response. The non-judgmental nature of mindfulness is important because it work against the normative labelling of what is observed as good or bad, or right or wrong and the inevitable misunderstandings this causes. Non-judgemental awareness thus supports a general training of awareness, which can have benefits in a range of situations.

At a practical level, mindfulness involves meditation techniques that can be carried out in group or individual settings. These practices are conducted while sitting down, lying on the floor, or walking. Mindfulness training programmes are often organized around standard 8-week courses, which have been developed to support MBSR and MBCT programmes. The development and maintenance of a long-term mindfulness practice is, however, seen to be vital for the benefits to be felt. Beyond its therapeutic applications, mindfulness training is now associated with a range of beneficial impacts including improvements in physical health, supporting social relationships of various kinds, enhanced work-place performance and leadership, advances in learning capacities, and general increases in measurable forms of wellbeing (Rowson, 2014).

Despite the proven and potential benefits of mindfulness, it is important to acknowledge a series of questions that have recently been raised (for an overview see Halliwell, 2014). These questions relate both to the general use of mindfulness and to the ways in which it is being applied in secular, non-therapeutic contexts. In the first context, concerns have been raised that mindfulness is being too quickly adopted as a panacea-like solution to a range of social problems (Furedi, 2014). In the second instance, long-term mindfulness practitioners and teachers have

claimed that care needs to be taken to insure that as mindfulness is adapted and applied within new contexts, that its core messages and values are not forgotten. In designing and delivering the MBCEPP programme, we were careful to address these issues. The intervention recounted here actually builds on a previous study which trialled the use of mindfulness practice as a basis for supporting sustainable behaviours. This study, which was conducted by Rachel Lilley, also involved interviewing a series of experienced mindfulness teachers and practitioners in order to collect their views on the potential connections between mindfulness and behaviour change.

2.2 Introducing Behaviour Change

The last decade has witnessed a transformation in the ways in which governments and policy makers understand human decision-making and behaviour. This transformation is often referred to as the *Behaviour Change Agenda*. At the heart of the Behaviour Change Agenda are two insights:

- 1 That although changing human behaviour remains a fundamental goal of government policy, public policy makers have found it difficult to change long-term behavioural patterns (particularly in relation to healthy living, sustainable lifestyles, and financial responsibility);
- 2 That human behaviour is more emotionally oriented than traditional theories suggest.

Primarily, recent behaviour change policies have been informed by the insights of the behavioural sciences (and in particular behavioural psychology and behavioural economics). These behavioural sciences suggest that while government policies have traditionally focused on the rational dimensions of human decision-making, which are triggered by the provision of information, regulation, or financial incentives (these forms of more deliberate decision-making are often referred to as System 2 thinking), a significant portion of human behaviour is actually shaped by unconscious, seemingly irrational, prompts (these forms of more intuitive decision-making are often referred to as System 1 thinking). These prompts include our emotional aversion to loss, our tendency to prioritise short-term gain over long-term needs, humans' propensity to "blend-in" with what others are doing, and our collective preference for supporting the status quo over change (see John et al 2011: 14-18 for an accessible review of these behavioural traits). These behavioural tendencies not only result in people making habitual decisions that are not in their own long-term interests, but, perhaps more worryingly, they are behavioural triggers of which we are often unaware.

Emerging behaviour change policies have utilized the insights of the behavioural sciences in order to develop more emotionally literate forms of public policy.

Related forms of policy use insights into the emotional aspects of human decision-making in order to make it easier for people make decisions that are in their own and society's long-term interests. A recent study showed that evidence of these forms of behaviour changing policies can be seen in 136 states throughout the world, with 51 governments developing centrally orchestrated policy programmes that strategically integrate the insights of the behavioural sciences into policy development areas (Whitehead et al 2014). The UK government's Behavioural Insights Team provides the most discussed, and arguably the most developed, example of the application of the behavioural sciences into public policy-making. The UK's Behavioural Insights Team is applying the insights of the behavioural sciences to policy areas as diverse as charitable giving, energy conservation, taxation, and healthy living.

It is important to be aware of two popular misconceptions concerning the Behaviour Change Agenda. First, there is a tendency to equate behaviour change policies (and in particular the work of prominent groups such as the Behavioural Insights Team) with the popular notion of *nudge*. Nudges are behaviour change policies 'that alter[s] people's behaviour in a predictable way without forbidding any options or significantly changing their economic incentives' (Thaler and Sunstein, 2008: 6). A key characteristic of nudges is that they tend to target the behaviour of individuals and to focus on unconscious prompts to action. While nudge is clearly a prominent behaviour change strategy it is also apparent that the governments, NGOs, international organisations, corporations, and consultancies that advocate the insights of the behavioural sciences use a varied pallet of policy tools. These other policy tools, which include values-based approaches, co-design, connected conversations, and steering techniques, recognise the emotional aspect of human decision-making, but attempt to change behaviour through more consciously-oriented techniques.

A second misconception that surrounds the Behaviour Change Agenda is the relationship between System 1 and System 2 forms of decision-making. At one level, people often assume that more psychologically oriented theories of decision-making suggest that human behaviour is reducible to more intuitive, System 1 action. At another level, it is also assumed that in targeting System 1 decision-making behaviour change policies are trying to correct the inherent pathologies of automatic forms of behaviour. In the first instance behaviour change policies often involve developing policies that reflect human tendencies to respond to both rational and more automatic prompts to action. In the second instance, there is widespread acknowledgement that both System 1 and System 2 are vital for effective forms of decision-making and that policies should simply enable people to engage the system that is most effective in a given situation.

2.3 Mindfulness and Behaviour Change

For some time there has been an intuitive assumption that mindfulness practices and the insights of the Behaviour Change Agenda could be creatively combined (Rowson, 2011). At the simplest of levels, it has been suggested that the *present-centred non-judgmental awareness* associated with mindfulness could help people to develop new relationships with forms of emotional, intuitively based System 1 behaviours of which we are often unaware. These ideas have been provisionally tested in studies exploring the role of mindfulness training in supporting pro-environmental behaviours (Lilley, 2012) and in helping to address addictive consumption practices (Armstrong, 2012). These studies have been based upon the hypothesis that mindfulness training can support the development of forms of *neurological reflexivity* through which people can begin to identify and understand the prompts that cause damaging behaviours and potentially establish new behavioural patterns (Rowson, 2011; Lea et al, 2014). The study outlined in this report builds on this emerging body of work, but is distinct in at least two respects:

- 1 It seeks to systematically combine mindfulness training with the insights of the Behaviour Change Agenda. The MBCEPP programme was thus specifically designed to combine mindfulness training practices with a thorough introduction to the insights of the new behavioural sciences.
- 2 The course was designed for policy-makers, within the civil service and beyond, who are largely responsible for developing behaviour change policies and interventions. Previous studies have tended to focus on delivering mindfulness-based behaviour change training to members of the general public, or the application of standard mindfulness training to people with self-identified behavioural problems (such as addictive behaviours).

In order to understand better the potential utility of the MBCEPP it is important to reflect upon some of the concerns that have been raised with the Behaviour Change Agenda. These concerns can be summarised through the three e's of ethics, empowerment, and efficacy (Jones et al 2013). Ethical concerns have frequently been raised about the Behaviour Change Agenda. The uses of new psychological insights, which often target sub- (or semi-) conscious processes, to change the behaviour of individuals are always going to be open to charges of manipulation. In its Behaviour Change report of 2011, the House of Lords Science and Technology Select Committee argued that behaviour change interventions needed to be transparent so that they could be subject to appropriate forms of public scrutiny (House of Lords, 2011: pages 108-109). Related ethical concerns have been raised regarding whether the Behaviour Change Agenda reflects an unwarranted intrusion by the state into the private lives of its citizens (House of Lords, 2011: para.2.19). Connected to these ethical questions have been discussions about

the relationship between behaviour change policies and empowerment. Some commentators have argued that in attempting to correct the behavioural errors generated by System 1 thinking, policy-makers are acting in ways that are disempowering to citizens. It is claimed that by subtly changing choice architectures in order to nudge people towards more favourable behaviours, policy-makers are depriving individuals of the chance of understanding and shaping their own behavioural destinies (Furedi, 2011). Related critiques claim that the Behaviour Change Agenda actively undermines people's autonomy not only because they are often not aware that they are being nudged, but because they lose the opportunity to make *warranted mistakes* and to subsequently enhance their own behavioural learning and sense of moral independence (Furedi, 2011: 135). The final group of critiques surrounding the Behaviour Change Agenda questions its efficacy. These critiques suggest that while nudge-type policies are successful in changing simple behaviours over short periods of time, they are a lot less successful at transforming more complex habits over people's life cycles (Jones, et al 2013). Those questioning the efficacy of behaviour changing policies often point out that related policies seek to change the behaviours of individuals but not the individuals and the societies they inhabit (Crompton, 2010).

In developing the MBCEPP programme we were interested to see the extent to which mindfulness training could help to address the questions of ethics, empowerment, and efficacy that have been levelled at behaviour changing policies. As regards ethics, we believe that the participatory nature of mindfulness training would help to ensure that attempts to change behaviour through the MBCEPP programme would be open and transparent. In addition, we felt that attempting to achieve behaviour change through mindfulness training would ensure that related interventions would be carried out with due concern for the particular circumstances and experiences of participants. In relation to questions of empowerment, we were keen to explore whether learning about behaviour change through mindfulness practice could enhance participant's understanding of their own behaviours, and thus enable them to shape their own behaviours more effectively in the future. We were particularly interested to see the extent to which mindfulness training could enable people to become more aware not only of the impact of the intuitive and emotional dimensions of System 1 processes, but also of the role of System 2 thinking on their behaviour. In this way, we are keen to explore the extent to which participants on the MBCEPP become more aware of the complex ways in which System 1 and System 2 thinking interact and the positive and negative impacts which these systems have on their actions. In relation to efficacy, it is our intention in the future to explore the impact of mindfulness-based behaviour change training on long-term, complex behavioural patterns (although this is a project that is beyond the scope of the programme outlined here). In particular we are interested in the extent to which mindfulness may provide a context within which

to engage with the values that appear to be so important to sustaining a commitment to behaviour change over longer periods of time.

In attempting to explore some of the critiques that have been levelled at the Behaviour Change Agenda, the MBCEPP programme ultimately addresses an issue that lies at the very centre of the contemporary behaviour change debate. This issue concerns whether the behavioural biases and heuristics that often lead to harmful behaviours, are an unavoidable part of the human condition or can be changed and transformed. On one side of the debate is the Nobel Prize winning scholar Daniel Kahneman, who suggests that we cannot simply learn to switch of the behavioural biases that emerge out of System 1 thinking and intuition (Kahneman, 2012). There are others, such as the eminent psychologist Gerd Gigerenzer, who claim that humans have the capacity to become more behaviourally "savvy" and to control their automatic selves (Gigerenzer, 2014). The MBCEPP programme is predicated on the hypothesis that when combined with learning about behaviour change, mindfulness training can enable people to take greater control of their own behavioural systems and lead more empowered lives.

3 The Mindfulness, Behaviour Change and Engagement in Public Policy 8-Week Programme

The table below provides a brief overview of the MBCEPP programme and the ways in which the individual sessions were structured.

3.1. Summary of course plan

The course is based on the eight-week standard MBCT course, but with a theoretical base drawn from behavioural economics, behavioural psychology and sociology. Each session included:

- A check in
- Practice (e.g. body scan, sitting/walking meditation, sounds and thoughts meditation)
- Pair and group reflection
- Theoretical reflection (e.g. exploring habit formation, the nature of System 1 and System 2 thinking, and heuristics)
- Close

Between each session participants received support information:

- Via Mailchimp
- Via a group Facebook page
- Via responses to queries sent directly by email to the trainer

Each participant had an interview with the teacher at the beginning of the programme to clarify the practice requirements and their areas of interest and motivations for doing the course.

Lesson	Mindfulness	Behaviour change	Additional Comments
Taster	Raisin practice, reflection, questions	Overview of behaviour change	Giving taster of practices and inquiry method as well as background
1	Introduction to body scan and short breath practice, short stretch	Automatic mind Understanding habits	Noticing habits and experimenting with changing habits
2	Repeat body scan/extend breath practice, short stretch	System 1 and 2 thinking, reflection versus fast response	Inviting a noticing of decisions/choices
3	Extend breath practice and add sound and breathing space	Discussion of role of emotion in behavioural motivations	Inviting a noticing of nature of responses

Lesson	Mindfulness	Behaviour change	Additional Comments
4	Developing practice – repeat and extend breath/sound/thoughts, add walking	Introduce models of behaviour change through Andrew Darnton's ISM model	Understanding key model of behaviour change and reflections on insights given by practice
5	Developing practice– extending practice into dealing with difficulty in practice	Repeat and development of above	As above
6	Reflection and repeating of dealing with difficulty, developing length of session to incorporate breath/body/thoughts	Branded mind and nature of good and bad experiences and our responses	Understanding role of aversion and desire in behaviours – explore relevance to pro-social/environmental behaviours
7	Integrating befriending/compassion meditation; develop length of session – embedding practice	Heuristics challenge – look at behavioural heuristics with short group quiz	Re-visiting System 1 thinking alongside emotional motivators
8	Longer session – combining breath/body/thoughts and compassion – embedding practice	Reviewing and applying ideas relating to habits/behaviours and designing future practice support	Reflection and application of theory

As this table illustrates, the MBCEPP programme is both a work-based training programme with wide-ranging implications for people's working and private lives, and a more bespoke programme of training for behaviour change professionals.

3.2. Key Terms Glossary

Automatic Mind: The cognitive processes that are involved in making decisions without having to engage in effortful thought. The automatic mind is actually responsible for a significant portion of all human decision-making, although we are often not conscious of its role in guiding our daily actions.

ISM Model: An integrated model of behaviour change developed by Andrew Darnton (Darnton and Evans, 2013). The ISM model draws attention to the role of individual (habits and values), social (norms and networks) and material (infrastructures and rules and regulations) factors in shaping human behaviour.

Heuristics: Behavioural shortcuts that we use to assist in decision-making. Researchers have identified over 100 behavioural heuristics. Prominent behavioural heuristics include the status quo bias (the tendency to continue behaving in the way you

have previously done); loss aversion (the human propensity to dislike loss more than to favour gain); and future bias (the proclivity to favour benefits in the here and now compared to ones that only accrue over longer periods of time).

4 Evaluation Results

With all the focus on quick gains to health and happiness, there may be something deeper to these practices that our positive-results focused science and culture is missing.

— Halliwell, 2014

4.1 Evaluation Methods

In order to evaluate the impacts of the MBCEPP programme we developed a mixed methodology approach. This mixed methodology had three components:

- 1 An online survey that all participants were invited to complete.¹
- 2 In-depth semi-structured interviews with a sample of 5 of the participants.
- 3 Feedback and “feed-forward” workshop convened at the end of the programme.

4.1.a Online Survey

We developed an online survey (using Qualtrics software) to evaluate the impacts of the MBCEPP programme. Participants completed the survey before the MBCEPP programme began, and immediately after the course was complete. We are also planning to re-run the survey 6 months after the programme, to assess the longer-term impacts of the course. The pre-course survey combined a self-assessment of participants' knowledge of the principles of behaviour change (including topics such as habit formation, heuristics, and the role of emotion in decision-making) with the 39-point Five Facets of Mindfulness Questionnaire. In addition to the 49 questions contained in the survey that was completed by participants before they took the programme, the post-course questionnaire also contained questions that enabled participants to reflect on the impact of the course.

4.1.b In-depth Interviews

Although the online survey provided some important quantitative measure of the impacts of the MBCEPP programme, we recognised that much of the impact of the

¹ Eleven participants completed the pre-course questionnaire, and fifteen completed the post-course questionnaire.

course could be missed by a series of pre-set questions with standard response formats. We consequently carried out a series of 5 in-depth interviews with a purposive sample of 5 participants. We selected participants to be interviewed on the basis of their attendance rates on the MBCEPP programme and their gender. We interviewed two male and 3 female participants, some of whom had attended all 8 of the programme sessions, and others who had only been able to make 4 sessions. The interviews were carried out via phone, and lasted between 30 and 50 minutes. The interviews explored various aspects of the course and its impacts on the working and private lives of participants. Particular emphasis was given in the interviews to the level of success the programme was able to achieve in bringing together mindfulness and behaviour change insights.

4.1.c Feedback and Feed-Forward Workshop

At the end of the MBCEPP programme a feedback and “feed-forward” workshop was convened. This workshop, which was facilitated by the Welsh Government, involved all of the participants on the course, along with the MBCEPP programme leader and a researcher from Aberystwyth University. The workshop provided a small and whole group context for discussing the strengths and weaknesses of the programme and its impacts. It enabled qualitative feedback to be gained from participants on the course who had not been interviewed. In terms of feed-forward, the session also involved discussion of how the insights of the MBCEPP programme could be integrated into the wider working of the Welsh Government. Three note takers recorded the conversations that were held during this workshop. These notes were typed-up and have been included in the evaluation of the programme.

4.2 Key Results

4.2.a Understanding Behavioural Change

The online survey asked respondents to reflect upon their knowledge and awareness of 10 key behaviour change themes (as listed below).

- 1** I am aware of how I create habits
- 2** I am aware of how I can change my habits
- 3** I am aware that my mind often works on ‘automatic pilot’
- 4** I am aware of how the surrounding environment can affect my behaviour
- 5** I am aware of how different emotions can affect my behaviour
- 6** I am aware of how mental shortcuts (such as confirmation bias and future discounting) can affect my behaviour
- 7** I am aware of how my values and beliefs can affect my behaviour
- 8** I am aware of how social norms can affect my behaviour

- 9 I understand why others find changing their behaviour difficult
- 10 I empathise with the difficulties others experience when trying to change behaviour

Our survey revealed that participants experienced a statistically significant increase (at the 95% confidence level) in their agreement with each of these statements following completion of the course. This finding is significant given the fact that some of the participants who completed an in-depth interview reported that they had a working knowledge of behaviour change concepts before they began the course.

In-depth interviews revealed that the behaviour change component of the course was helpful to participants at two levels. First, and in a general sense, participants suggested that the course provided a fresh insight into the nature and purpose of policy. For example, one participant stated that:

[w]e are so obsessed with process, and the way we do policy and legislation it seems that our mantra is that people will just do it because we say. They have just got to do it! And even if you use a law, it's not always effective because people resent it or people only do the bare minimum [...] It just seems that we need to be more sensitive and it's more complex than we think.

— MBCEPP Participant I

The implication of this statement is that following the course this participant was able to discern more clearly the limitations of conventional, regulatory policy tools (such as laws, subsidies, and penalties), which tend to assume that humans respond in predictable ways to these kinds of policy prompts.

Second, participants suggested that the behaviour change insights presented in the MBCEPP were relevant for more specific aspects of policy design. One participant observed that,

If you are offering somebody an incentive or framing things in a language that isn't salient and meaningful to them, then you will not produce the change that you want [...] the behaviour change aspect of the course is certainly getting that across.

— MBCEPP Participant II

This statement echoes the emphasis that the MBCEPP programme placed on developing policies that acknowledge the important role of emotional relevance in behaviour change.

A recurring theme in the interviews was the ways in which the MBCEPP programme enabled participants to better understand the role of habits in supporting established behaviours and the different ways in which habits could be changed and redirected. Participants also suggested that it would actually have been helpful to devote more time to allow for more detailed discussion of theories of behaviour change within the programme.

4.2.b The Five Facets of Mindfulness and the overall impacts of the MBCEPP

Our survey of the Five Facets of Mindfulness indicated that the only facet that showed a statistically significant increase (at the 95% confidence level) from before to after the course was 'Awareness.' We believe that this result should be interpreted with caution. The Five Facets of Mindfulness framework offers a fairly limited scale upon which to test changes in mindfulness traits. Furthermore, when we asked participants to assess the extent to which they felt they had seen an increase in mindfulness traits within themselves following the course, the responses showed they felt a moderate increase for each trait (observing, describing, non-reacting, awareness, non-judging).

Our survey also revealed that all respondents felt that they would "probably" or definitely continue with a mindfulness practice into the future.

The online survey revealed that participants reported that the course had a beneficial impact on their personal and working life. Qualitative evaluation of the MBCEPP was able to explore these impacts in greater depth.

At, perhaps, the most fundamental of levels, participants suggested that the mindfulness training they had received as part of this course had contributed to overall enjoyment of life and wellbeing:

I am able to focus on things much better and it helps you feel much calmer about the things that you have to do. I think you get much more enjoyment as well when you apply that to anything. You get much more enjoyment from even carrying out quite simple tasks.

— MBCEPP Participant III

More specifically in relation to work, participants identified a series of specific ways in which the MBCEPP programme had been beneficial. Perhaps the most obvious benefit that participants identified in relation to the programme was the way in which it enhanced their ability to cope with stress and difficult situations at work. As one participant observed (while reflecting on the MBCEPP session that focuses on “difficulties”):

One of the things I found quite uncomfortable when I did the practice [was] the dealing with difficulties [...] And I think that is something that you kind of know. You know that you react and your body tells you. You know there is a physiological spot, you can feel it. But I think that the mindfulness practice would just confirm what I kind of knew would happen to me when I'm in a difficult situation. But I think the real benefit was that actually doing the practice shows you how things just come and go and it's transitory and things dissipate. I think that for me that was just really powerful, and I think that it is really useful. You put yourself in that position rather than avoid it.

— MBCEPP Participant I

In this context, it appears that the programme did not serve to help participants avoid the working pressures and difficult situations that can lead to workplace stress, but that it enabled them to develop new, non-judgemental relations with stressful feelings and responses. This observation would indicate that the course did have some impact on the non-reacting and non-judgemental behavioural traits that are associated with being more mindful.

Again in relation to stress, another participant observed,

There's a lot of people who were under a lot of stress because of what they have to deliver and cuts in resources, staff cuts. You know, more and more we are expected to do more and more with less resources. So I think that the course can help people to just entitle them to a general sort of health and wellbeing. I think that it can help people to manage their stress levels and how they manage things generally.

— MBCEPP Participant III

It is interesting to note that although the MBCEPP programme was developed as a non-therapeutic form of intervention, it was still able to deliver forms of therapeutic benefits that are associated with standard mindfulness courses.

In addition to stress reduction, participants also reported that the programme had benefits for other aspects of their work as civil servants. Different participants observed how the MBCEPP programme had enabled them to improve the *quality* of their work,

[y]ou've sometimes five or six different things that you have to do all at the same time. And what I found that practice has helped [me] to do is to focus on just doing one thing at one time and devoting yourself to that as totally as you can. And so in that respect, it's definitely improved the quality of whether it's just commenting on a document or reading through something or whatever, it's definitely improved that.

— MBCEPP Participant III

I think that it's really important having the capacity to learn and think rather than just going with the prevailing wind [...] if you do that you can start changing how you see, even how you look, at things. If you don't give yourself space I think that you just get caught-up with the tide.

— MBCEPP Participant I

It appears that by facilitating greater focus on the present moment and providing an opportunity for reflection the MBCEPP programme enabled participants to work more effectively and creatively when addressing work-based projects.

Participants also reported that the mindfulness practice they developed facilitated better working relations with others. In relation to the civil service the others in question belong to three main groups: 1. those working in the Civil Service; 2. external stakeholders who are involved in the development and implementation of policies; and 3. members of the public. Participants reflected that in enabling them to understand the complexities of their own experience, the mindfulness practice had made them much more sensitive towards the views, feelings and perspectives of others. In one example, a participant describes how they had used the insights gained from the MBCEPP programme to facilitate their own team meetings in new ways:

[w]e had a joint meeting between a couple of branches of our division this week that I was part of and facilitated. The facilitation, I had a real think about that before. Before I might have just gone into it and [done it]. I had a real think about it beforehand. I actually thought about other people's perceptions and how it was going to work.

— MBCEPP Participant IV

It appears that in this instance the self-awareness that the mindfulness practice had generated in this participant influenced the ways in which they thought about and designed the interactions they were charged with developing within their working groups.

Perhaps the most significant finding of our qualitative research was the particular utility that mindfulness training appeared to have for civil servants. At one level, a participant suggested that the MBCEPP course enabled them to align their work with the forms of values that had lead them into the civil service in the first place:

[w]e get told that we should act in this way, we should strive for excellence, we should be efficient. You know all of those kinds of mantras come out in terms of a corporate sort of approach. And I just, I don't think people connect with them at all. And I've made myself connect with them because I've always felt, 'but they want us all to be close and us all to do x, y and z the same'. And it always feels like that. But I just think that as a way of connecting with the vision of an organization, I think there's a lot more in the mindfulness theory that can help us to be better and more sensitive and listen more and be better connected to stakeholders [...]

— MBCEPP Participant I

It appears that the practice of mindfulness enabled this participant to see a vision of the civil service that was less oriented to corporate goals and strategies and more geared towards deep public service. This participant went on to state that,

[y]ou feel 'oh hang on a minute' you know, 'I'm here to, I wanted to do a public service. This is what I want to do'. And I don't think we are sensitive enough to the public and the public's need [...] What we should be doing is investing in relationships and we should be talking to people, and we should be out there really getting to grips and understanding what people are going through. They are not tangible things that you can put it on a desk and show them [managers] what you have done.

— MBCEPP Participant I

The work of the Common Cause Initiative (<http://valuesandframes.org/>) emphasizes that the effective alignment of values and action is a crucial part of retaining a happy and effective work force (particularly in the public and third sectors). It appears that the MBCEPP programme could help to engage these values within the civil service.

At another level, participants also claimed that the MBCEPP programme had enabled them to recognise and be more open about the subjective processes that influence their decisions as civil servants. One participant observed:

[the MBCEPP course] raises your own awareness of perhaps your own personal prejudices and reactions when dealing with others [...] but the thing with civil servants—this is a cliché—is that we're not really supposed to have opinions. But of course we do. We have to have professional opinions, which might not necessarily align with our personal opinions. But I think that [the course] facilitates the ability to do that. Because you have to engage in a form of double think at times. And a course like this facilitates the ability to be able to think along a different line than the one you might be automatically inclined to fall into. At times, obviously what I am thinking is the obstacle to being able to pursue policy effectively.

— MBCEPP Participant II

This participant recognises that civil servants are trained to maintain forms of objective professionalism as part of their work. The problem appears to be that this objective professionalism often involves the denial of the inevitable subjective responses that inform public policy development and decision-making. It seems that the MBCEPP programme enabled this participant to more openly recognize the

subjective influences that routinely inform their work and achieve much more meaningful forms of objectivity than they had previously been able to maintain.

4.2.c Mindfulness and Behaviour Change

One thing that the online survey was not able to measure was the extent to which mindfulness practice had a direct impact on participants' understandings of behaviour change ideas. The survey did reveal an increase in participants' reported understanding of behaviour change theories and their mindfulness traits. What it was not able to assess was the extent to which participants' reported increase in understanding of new behavioural insights was a product of mindfulness practice or just the MBCEPP programme's discussion of behaviour change ideas. Therefore we used qualitative methods to assess the links between understanding the principles of behaviour change and mindfulness practice.

All of the five participants who participated in in-depth interviews claimed that mindfulness practice had enhanced the ways in which they understood human behaviour and the related ideas of behaviour change. Participants reported that the mindfulness practice had helped them develop an awareness of the automatic/emotional prompts to their own action. While automatic prompts to actions are emphasised within behaviour change theory, policy-makers often overlook them. One participant observed,

[y]ou know, I have just got so much more awareness. You know now, you know how we are? [...] I just think that it is really helpful. I was just amazed at how unconscious we are really and we are just set up to do certain things.

— MBCEPP Participant I

It is interesting to note that participants felt that learning about behaviour change through a practice of self-reflection facilitated by mindfulness was beneficial. It appears that the course was able to move learning about behaviour change from the abstract and impersonal, to the practical and personal. As one participant observed,

I think that it gave me a different perspective. I think that was useful because you always consider things as helping other people [...] I think it gives you a different perspective about it, going through the course yourself.

— MBCEPP Participant III

One interesting piece of feedback we received from a participant was that they actually felt that the mindfulness component of the programme was more helpful in relation to understanding ideas of behaviour change than the sections of the course that were devoted to discussing related theories from the behavioural sciences,

What I would say I've personally taken directly from the course on a personal level is that they [academics and behaviour change experts] lack the experience of how difficult it is to change behaviour [...] I think that the mindfulness aspect of the course has perhaps given me more of an insight into behaviour change than the theoretical aspects of it.

— MBCEPP Participant II

Although this particular observation could reflect the relative balance of content in the course between mindfulness and behaviour change learning, it does suggest that mindfulness is an effective way of learning from experience about behaviour change.

One common theme that ran through both the in-depth interviews and feedback/feed forward sessions is the relationship between the course and the types of behaviour change policies it is likely to promote. The deeper levels of personal awareness of self and others developed within the course appeared to lead participants to support behaviour change policies that were empowering and non-manipulative. Related to this, participants stated that the course had confirmed the importance they attached to being more open about the policy-making process and to acknowledge more freely the limitations and failings of public policy.

5 Future Directions

The inaugural MBCEPP programme described in this report is clearly only a first step in the study of the relationships between mindfulness, behaviour change and public policy. While the MBCEPP programme appears to have generated many positive results, it is important that these results are verified with further interventions. At present we are planning to run more trials with staff within the Welsh Civil Service and with Non-Governmental Organisations that specialise in delivering behaviour changing interventions. As these trials are implemented we are keen to explore the development of a quantitative scale that could more accurately measure the direct impacts of the MBCEPP programme on understandings of the principles of behaviour change. In the longer term, it will be important to take the MBCEPP programme out of the workplace in order to test its impacts on identified forms of public behaviour. In the more immediate future, we will be working with our initial trial group of fifteen civil servants to see if the impacts of the MBCEPP programme identified in the report are still evident 6 months after the course formally ended.

Overall we hope that the MBCEPP programme and this report can contribute to the emerging body of work that is exploring the potential roles of mindfulness in society and the ways in which it may be possible to develop more empowering forms of behaviour change within public policy.

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